

BUENA VISTA, The Township of

Just why a Spanish name like Buena Vista was allowed to creep into Portage County, surrounded by French-English and Indian names, is a moot question. In one of his frequent articles to the press, Sherman in 1881 wrote, *inter alia*, that,

“I found Mitchel and Brown, who were keeping a hotel at Stevens Point, had made a claim at Buena Vista and erected a board shanty . . . There being so much strife about hotel keeping, and just after the battle of Buena Vista, we named Mitchell and Browns first shanties Buena Vista, and the place has gone by that name ever since.”¹

But Sherman did not arrive in Stevens Point until the latter part of 1848, more than a year and a half after Zachary Taylor's famed force of 5,000 defeated Santa Anna's 20,000. It is more likely that this shanty, which apparently served as a tavern-house, was named after a tavern called “Buena Vista” near East Troy, Wisconsin, which, in fact, was completed soon after the battle of Buena Vista and “the proprietor named his hotel in honor of the victory of American troops.”²

There is reason to believe that the Mitchell and Brown shanty was the predecessor of a tavern-house called Buena Vista built in 1850-51 by Wellington Kollock and William Wigginton on the Air Line Road. The fact that there was a hotel here by that name in 1851 is confirmed in the surveyor's field notes on Town 22, Range 9. From the description it was located 10 chains (about 40 rods) south of the west random line between sections 19 & 30 which places it about in the middle of Lot 2, Sec 30 south of Buena Vista Creek, or about 30 rods east of the present Keene Store. This

¹ *Stevens Point Journal*, Aug. 27, 1881.

² *Stagecoach and Tavern Tales of the Old Northwest*, p. 319.

had a spring dance floor even as the one at East Troy and it is quite possible that either Kollock or Wigginton spent the night in East Troy en route to Portage County. Whatever, it is clear that the naming of the tavern-house preceded the organization of the township and from which it, as well as the creek, got its name.

Around this tavern-house developed the community known as Buena Vista where a post office of the same name was established Sept. 25, 1850. Kollock served as the first postmaster. Thus the first Buena Vista post office was located not around Liberty Corners, where it was later located and where the 1895 plat places it, but south of Buena Vista Creek.

The Buena Vista tavern apparently was the center of the community. A few years later the editors of the *Pinery* reported that on Friday, Aug. 20, 1863, one of the most "terrific tornadoes that we have ever been called upon to record" passed through the county. The worst damage was suffered in "the village of Buena Vista" which was "entirely destroyed," and the "residence of Kollock and Wigginton riddled, killing Mr. Kollock, Mr. Wigginton and Miss Hill."¹ The news report goes on to explain that Mrs. Kollock and Mrs. Wigginton and six children were extricated from the ruins, all injured. Ever after, this tornado was referred to locally as "the big blow."

In 1870, probably after the Buena Vista post office had been moved to Liberty Corners, a post office called Keen was established a short distance west of the community once known as Buena Vista. The origin of this name is uncertain and, while the modern spelling is Keene, a watermark on a letter of the period reveals that the spelling was *Keen*. William Carver served as the first postmaster, later followed by Thomas Newby, a local store keeper. The post office was discontinued in 1904.

The subdivision of Buena Vista in Range 9, as al-

¹ *Pinery*, Aug. 26, 1863.

ready noted, was undertaken in 1851. In his summing up, the surveyor made this notation:

“The Township contains 26 families and about 100 souls all engaged in farming. The waters of the Township flow into Buena Vista creek on the W (est) and into a stream which runs eastwardly into the Waupaca. Water clear and cold.”

The stream referred to is no doubt Spring Creek which originates in the eastern sections of the township in Range 9 and flows into Lanark. Aside from this and Buena Vista Creek there are no other streams in the township in Range 9, although Duck Creek flows through the length of Buena Vista in Range 8. The surveyors make no reference to the small lakes in Range 9 today known as Silver Lake in Sec 26, Tamarack and Patterson Lakes in Sec 33, and Riley, once known as Roth's Lake, in Sec 27.

Buena Vista was originally organized as one township of 36 sections (T. 22, R. 9) by the County Board which in March 1853 ordered that a town meeting be held the first Monday in May “at the house of Kollock and Wigginton.”¹ In 1856, a total of 24 sections in Town 22, Range 8, were taken from the town of Plover and annexed to Buena Vista. In 1858 Pine Grove petitioned that the two tiers of sections in the north of Town 21, Range 8, hitherto under Buena Vista, be included in its own jurisdiction. Buena Vista protested this action and a compromise was reached whereby the latter was allowed to keep the northern tier of sections 1 to 6, while Pine Grove got sections 7 to 12. In 1869 Buena Vista lost sections 13 to 18 in Town 22, Range 8, to Plover, but on May 4, 1870, sections 13, 14, & 15 in Town 22, Range 8, were taken from Plover and handed back to Buena Vista. In 1878 Sec 13 and the south half of Sec 12, Town 22, Range 8 were detached from Plover and attached to Buena Vista.

Before automobile traffic became rampant and men still had time to drive around a stone or stump in the

¹ *Proceedings*, Board of Supervisors, Vol. I, p. 205.

middle of the road, chiefly because they were not traveling faster than four miles an hour, one of the important community centers of the township developed at a cross roads known as Liberty Corners between sections 7 & 8. A flag pole stood in the center of the four corners which was displayed on election days and holidays. As the flag pole on the Public Square in Stevens Point was called the "Liberty Pole," it appears that the association of ideas between the two flag poles prompted the name Liberty Corners.

There were two well-known pioneer stores in this area, one called the Liberty Corners Store, and another a mile or so to the south called the "South Side" Store. The Hon. Frederick Huntley, one-time assemblyman, operated the store at Liberty Corners for many years before the turn of the century, and also held the post-mastership here. Schuyler Whittaker took over the store after Huntley. Part of the original building is still visible south of the Methodist Church.

The South Side Store was probably operated by Scott Clark before the century mark. According to local legend, Frederick Huntley was a staunch Republican and Clark an avid Democrat and as long as the Republicans were in office, the Buena Vista post office remained at Liberty Corners, but when the Democrats went in, the post office moved to the "South Side." The *Portage County Directory* lists Clark as a postmaster in 1896.

The 1876 plat identifies both a church and a school at Liberty Corners. The 1895 plat identifies two blacksmith shops, one on the north side and one on the south side of a road (Trunk JJ) next to the Liberty Corners School. Mrs. Theresa Scribner, nee Precourt of Stevens Point, a pupil at the school in the 1880s and '90s, fondly recalls the "wonderful teachers" she had here and vows that Liberty Corners always got the best because the school board paid the highest.

The intersection farther south where Trunk J today runs into H-54 came to be called Maynard's Corners after Ashley Maynard who operated a small tavern-inn on the northwest corner.

A third community to develop in Buena Vista in the 1870s was at Keene in Sec 30 and so identified on the 1876 plat. Buena Vista Creek, fed by springs, carried enough water at the time to form a fair sized pond here for boom-age. The embankment for the dam is still visible from H-51, although the first saw mill & foundry built by Albert B. Mathewson is believed to have operated on steam. A road survey of 1869 refers to Lots 3 & 4 "on the south bank of the creek near the mill (next word illegible) being built on the Buena Vista Creek." As these lots conform to the site since known as the Mathewson mill, it may be that the mill was actually built in 1869. It stood a few rods east of where Keene Store is today situated.

The old road to Keene ran straight south along Trunk BB, crossed the creek, and continued south over the hillside and then swung southeast to join the Portage road, today part of H-51. The first Keene Store stood on this road on the northeast corner of a "T" intersection formed by the north-south road, and another running east from the store along the north slope of the hill to Mathewson's mill. A few rods north of the store, but south of the bridge, a road was built west to the Wisconsin Central Railway which terminated in the southeast corner of Sec 22 (Range 8), where Buena Vista Station was established after 1875. The foundation of the first Keene store may still be seen, but the building was moved east a few rods to its present location when H-51 was re-routed across Buena Vista Creek in the 1930s.

On the southeast corner of the "T" intersection stood a "hotel" identified as such on the 1876 plat, known as "Mathewson House", built by Albert Mathewson to cater to his mill hands as well as the traveling public. In the early 1870s the stage to Portage stopped here. South of the hotel farther up the hillside stood the Methodist Church, dedicated July 11, 1875. On the west side of the road (Trunk BB) near the intersection stood two horse barns of the Mathewson mill crews who were cutting the timber on the marsh to the west. One veteran of the county who remembers Mathewson as well as these

barns is Fred Uptagrove, 88, of Stevens Point, who as a youth was hired to do the chores. Mathewson had become ill and called Uptagrove to his bedside and allegedly said: "Fred, you take care of the chores for me now, and when I get on my feet again I'll pay you well." But he never recovered.

South of the barns, according to Uptagrove, stood a shoemaker shop operated by Melvin Uptagrove, a blacksmith shop run by John Hazel, and a jewelry and photograph gallery operated by George Rosengrant. (The 1876 plat identifies a blacksmith shop north, not south of the bridge, on the east side of the road.)

The 1876 plat carries an advertisement of O. D. Barber, general store, in Sec 30, which may have been the same store located on the corner referred to above. The same plat also carries an advertisement of M. O. Reynolds, proprietor of a general store in Sec 30. As it is unlikely that two country stores were located this close together, it may be that either Barber or Reynolds was located farther east on the Air Line Road.

The 1876 plat carries an advertisement of A. F. Else as the owner of a grist mill and saw mill in Sec 29, while Mathewson is advertised as the owner of a grist mill and foundry in Sec 30. This appears to be an error, as both establishments were in Sec 29. It appears fairly certain that Mathewson was running a saw mill, at least in the early 1870s, and it seems unlikely that two grist mills would operate this close together. Abraham ("Abe") Else probably operated a grist mill after Mathewson ceased operations and which may have been taken over around 1880 by Alvey Mathewson, son of Albert, who lost his life in an accident in the mill while shelling corn.

Social life around Keene, aside from church and school activities, was enlivened by occasional cock fights in which the roosters were equipped with steel spurs. To the southeast of Keene, Walter Alexander owned land where he was raising horses and had built a race track. This may have been part of the sportman's playground situated near the village of Buena Vista of which the edi-

tor of the *Pinery* writes that “for the number of inhabitants there is no city in the west that can compare with Buena Vista in amount of business transacted or fun got up. At any time upon 10 minutes notice a horse race, in five minutes a foot race, or two minutes a dog fight can be started.”¹

A fourth community in Buena Vista township which developed with great hopes but failed the test of time was at Coddington. Its founder, W. (“Wallie”) B. Coddington platted a village here. The 1915 plat reveals that this village was to be known as “Pine Island”, presumably after several forties of higher ground in the marsh where the pine outgrew the tamarack. However, when a post office was established here in 1912, it was called Coddington, not Pine Island, with Lewis A. Kyers serving as postmaster. In a few years it is doubtful whether anyone will be able to recognize either, as the only evidence of a village here in 1958 was one abandoned store building and a number of foundations for buildings long overgrown with weeds.

Finally, several veterans of the township recall the small store operated by George Nugent, one of the “Delaware Irish,” on his farm in Sec 31 (The Roman Brychell place). Nugent served as town chairman in the 1870s.

Driving east on H-54 today from Moore Barn corner in an automobile — which the modern generation seldom refers to except as a “car,” a term once reserved for railway coaches — there is a sense of gliding through the countryside. This comes of the gentle slope of the terrain which eases away from the west Bluffs through a district long identified as Pleasant Valley, one of the most softly outlined landscapes in Wisconsin. Into this valley came some of the pioneer settlers of Portage County, and to serve this community a post office, called Surry, was established July 31, 1863 on the south side of the road (H-54) in Sec 15 (the Raymond Holtz farm). Both the 1876 plat and 1878 *Atlas* use the spelling “Surry” although the Postal Index uses Surrey, which suggests that it is of English or Yankee origin. George W. Hulce serv-

¹ *Pinery*, Dec. 2, 1859.

ed as the first postmaster. The post office was discontinued in 1891 and not even a spec of memory in Pleasant Valley recalls anything about it.

The earliest tax roll of Buena Vista, in which the ink has faded perceptibly, is dated 1857. The following paid taxes: (first name illegible) Thomas (last name illegible); (?) H. Spaulding, B. F. Vandervoort, John Newby, (?) Webster, B. F. Cooper, (?) Shelburn, Clinton Moss, Erastus Crofoot, Isaac Moss, O. M. Moss, Amos Courtright, Antoine Precourt, (next illegible), George Ainsworth, Ely Beers, Bait (?) (probably Bartholomew) Mahany (spelled Mahannah in 1872 tax roll), Jacob Moore, Phillip Yates, Thomas Newby, William Eckels, (next illegible), S. Bennett, Willard Grattan, L. Porter, J. Lombard, Samuel Galland, William Gilchrist, E. Grooves, John Galland, William Beeby, John Holaday, Willmot, Phelps, Bachelor (?) Brown, Hanibal Lombard, Allen Carpenter, Halbert Lombard, E. Bennett, A. B. Gilchrist, (?) Roberts, Brooks, N. Carpenter, G. Smith, W. Alberty, (next illegible); J. S. Myres, William Wigginton, Henry Kollock, (?) Henderson, W. Dickson (who is listed as having 50 acres in Town 21, apparently a mistaken entry as Buena Vista lies in Town 22), Mackendoo (probably McIndoe), (?) Brick, H. Bown) (next two illegible), W. Ainsworth, (?) Rice, G. Wood, (next illegible), S. Lamphere, V. Durkee, Joseph Mulkins, John Uptgrove, I. Uptgrove, Aaron (?), William Walton, William Dean, (?) Pines, David Tracy, Patterson, J. E. Benson, B. Berry, G. W. Mitchell, F. Huntley, Albert Mathewson, W. M. Hortshorn, Isah Goodrich, John O. Storm, William Bedent, William Benson, Ebe (?) Dannon, Mary Dickinson, Charles G. Wilcox, Robert (?), Almond R. Cole, Mathew A. Siely, Timothy S. Robinson, George W. Anstin, P. J. Burges, John Adams, John Smith, Daniel Driscoll, Thomas Yoggin, Miss Homes, Petter F. Goure, William Holbrook, William Gallight, Jesse B. Roberts, Jerome Adams, Henry Robinson, Anna Stone, (next illegible), B. Sharpstein, William Gray, Davis Moore, John Phillips, Elias Durphy, Gates, Rebecca Beebe, John Dallas, Hirim Wood, John (?), Asaph (?)

Carpenter, Lorenzo Stuard, N. Blodgett, Ambler, and S. W. Strong.

The 1857 assessment was signed by William Albertie, town clerk, and attested by Wellington Kollock and Serano Gates. Stephen Allen was town treasurer.

Serving the town of Buena Vista, with a population of 706, in 1957-58, were George Fletcher, chairman; John Guth and Charles Rusch, supervisors; Frank Dernbach, clerk; Edward Simcakoski, treasurer; Clair Eckels, assessor; J. K. Albertie and Frank Dernbach, justices of the peace; Eli P. Scribner, constable; and H. C. Steinke, health officer.

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